



National Disabled Veterans

Winter Sports Clinic



Skier Profile Carlos Leon — A True Contender

This man is a real sports fanatic. He is a rugby player, a member of an undefeated basketball team and he also enjoys track and field. "I'm not going to paint the picture all nice and pretty because there's really nothing pretty about being paralyzed," Leon said. "But you've got to keep going and live your life. Yes, I'm a quad, but I am not going to let that word define me." While Carlos Leon is medically classified as a quadriplegic, he won't let the diagnosis classify his life. By any measure of the word, he is a true athlete and a spirited competitor, both on the field and off.

At age 17, the newly graduated Leon joined the U.S. Marine Corps. A dedicated athlete, he joined the Marine soccer team and helped lead his team to victory at the 2003 Pacific Regional Championship in Japan. It all seems to be in his genes, as Leon's sister, a member of the Air Force, played soccer on a 2nd Division United States National team.

After serving a tour in Iraq, Leon and his unit went to Hawaii in May 2005. While there, Leon, who is of Colombian descent, was enjoying the island life—teaching salsa dancing and Spanish while awaiting his second deployment orders. While taking some students to a salsa tournament, Leon suggested they go for a swim. After diving into the blue Pacific waters, however, his life was changed forever.

"They thought I was doing the dead man's float," he said about his accident, the result of hitting a rock while diving. "I just couldn't figure out what was going on. I was confused as to why I couldn't move." Two hours later, doctors informed him that he was paralyzed.

Just seven months after his injury, he took steps again. "Before, during and after the accident, I am an athlete," Leon said. In 2006, he hit the slopes for the first time at the National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic. Although the 22-year-old Florida native said that he is not specifically training for this year's event, he does dedicate at least four hours each day to working out with lots of core strengthening exercises including Pilates, and also the balance ball. He's hoping now that the long hours and sweat will pay off and also hopes to be invited to join the 2008 Paralympics track and field team as a javelin, shot-put and discus contender.

For Leon, the love of athletics *and* life aren't simply in his genes, they are also in his heart. "The wind on my face, curving through that powder—I feel free," he said while reminiscing about his first time skiing at the Winter Sports Clinic. He admits that the views are breathtakingly beautiful from the mountaintops, but once he's up there he just wants to get down as fast as he can. He is not afraid of heights, he simply wants to be "the fastest guy down the hill!" Once again, Carlos Leon speaks like a true competitor—one who won't let anyone, or any word, get in his way.

[Above information provided by veteran.]

Miracles on a Mountainside!



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